

## The Many Wrens of the Texas Coast

By Martin Hagne

Texas has about 660 species of birds recorded that at least once appeared in the state. Of those, there are officially nine species of wrens that regularly occur in Texas, and six that frequent the Texas coast.

Wrens are all small songbirds, that are normally very skulky, preferring thick understory bushes, often flitting around low and deep in the foliage. A few prefer grasslands, or wet marshes. In spring and early summer, they are more visible as they sing trying to impress mates and move around gathering nesting materials. They glean the trees and bushes for insects which is pretty much their entire diet. Most of them have fairly bubbly, pretty, songs.

The Carolina Wren is maybe the most “visible” of the bunch, and fairly common. They are also the largest, but that doesn’t say much as its not much larger than the rest, at a mere 5.3 inches in length. They do tolerate people more than the rest though, often coming to suet feeders and bird baths, and they nest in every conceivable man-made object in and around your yard. Flower pots, BBQ pits, baseball caps hanging outside or in the garage, trailer hitches, and flower door wreaths are just a few examples.

The House Wren is mostly a winter resident here, but also often found (at east heard) during spring and fall migrations at migratory stopover sites, such as GCBO’s Quintana Neotropic Bird Sanctuary, and similar spots. As their name applies, they do like yards, but require thick bushes, and with good surrounding habitats. They are found more in wild areas than yards around here it seems.

Their little cousin the Winter Wren, is the smallest of the lot at just four inches long, and it is also a winter visitor here, not always found every winter. Most likely depending on food sources up north and elsewhere, dictates in what numbers they winter here. They like to skulk around in country fence lines, ditches, old overgrown abandoned homesteads, and other wild places.

The Bewick’s Wren, often mistakenly pronounced as the car make, Buick, prefers dryer upland dry brush country. They aren’t very common once they reach the upper Texas coast, preferring more westerly and dryer habitats. They are the second largest in length at about 5.1 inches. If you live in an area surrounded by the right habitat, they will come to water sources and may even nest around your home.

The last two species are a bit more specialized. They prefer grasses and sedges. The Marsh Wren prefers, well... marshes! Mostly freshwater wetlands, coastal marshes, pond and lake edges with reeds, and similar wet areas with thick “grassy/reedy” areas or edges. They are super hard to see, and are mostly heard signing their complex gurgling, bubbling, and rattling

trills. They dart around often low in the reeds, but once again, come spring you may get lucky seeing one sitting up on a stalk singing.

Our last commonly occurring wren along the coast is the Sedge Wren...and you guessed it... they do like sedges. And all kinds of grasses, and they prefer a drier, grassy prairie type situation. Besides wild coastal prairies, which are hard to find these days, old pastures that have grown up in taller grasses and sedges are perfect for them. They are found more inland due to that preference.